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THE

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

OF

ANCIENT IRISH MELODY:

The Scales.

A PLEA FOR RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION.

BEING

A LECTURE

READ

ON MONDAY EVENING, 15th FEBRUARY, 1897,

Before the National Literary Society.

BY

JAMES C. CULWICK.

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ANCIENT IRISH MELODY.

Among the many by-paths of musical study it would scarcely be possible to find any avenue more attractive, or more likely to delight the leisure of the musical student, than that which runs far back into the shades of antiquity, and traverses the widely-spread and mysterious regions of ancient Folk-song. Among such scenes we propose to-night for awhile to linger.

In paying a visit of inquiry to these remote regions we need not—we shall not—regard with any less affection the more frequented parts of the musical field. On the contrary we shall see with a better informed mind the true position of all things, and with a surer judgment gauge their relative value. We may even venture to promise to any musical student who will study the truth in National music, many an added ornament, and powerful and ever fresh resources in expression.

In Folk-song, Poetry and Music grow and blossom together to infold and complete each other like melody and harmony, and thus completed they form an emotional record telling what manner of men they were who sang these songs—what they loved—how they lived.

Supposing skill to be equal, it is with individual musicians (whether composers or performers) as it is with nations. Dreamers and sentimentalists, and men of energetic and vigorous habits, the happy and contented, and those who are suffering under oppression and misery, will make music of a diverse character. To take an example—energy of character and life are expressed through a strongly marked rhythm, through melody made of wide skips, unexpected changes of all sorts, through harmony that is strong and energetic, and often swiftly changing, while people of a reflective or romantic turn, losing much of these qualities, will rather be inclined to what we call *cantabile* effects. Rhythmic definiteness they are content to neglect if only the emotional waves, and the rise and fall of the vocal cadences, are sufficiently regarded. Hence there arise those strongly marked contrasts heard

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in the national songs of the world. Take the music of the Saxon races, and compare it with the Latin; or, take by way of comparison, the strong, broad-shouldered, robust, and square-headed, sturdy and bold song-music of England, and compare it with the fervour, romance, and softened imagination of the early Irish music. These two styles may, in a sense, be said to complete the one the other: while they differ they are not necessarily antagonistic. To me they have always appeared to illustrate the strength of the masculine, and the sweetness of the feminine qualities of music; and as in ordinary life nothing feminine is perfect without some masculine qualities, and nothing masculine is at its best unless it includes a touch of feminine grace, so is it here; the one completes the other.

But this study of music by the methods of the comparative anatomist we must not further indulge in. For my task to-night is rather to put before you several considerations that I trust may lead to a somewhat better understanding, at least on one side, of our beautiful Irish melody. I wish chiefly to endeavour to show in what lie the distinctive characteristics of Irish song. In making this attempt, while touching many things lying in our path, I shall lean almost altogether on that division of the subject which includes a consideration of its scale forms and the history of their development. This is a point much needing of some further explanation. Many have written of construction and rhythm, but we have but very little help in understanding the ancient scale forms.

With such a subject in hands, you will not, I trust, expect from me anything in the form of what is usually called a popular lecture—that is, a string upon which to thread pleasantries and anecdotes; but you will, I am persuaded, be willing to give my subject a patient and attentive hearing. I can, at least, promise you some compensation in the recital of some of the sweetest music the world knows. I wish to lay no claim to originality, nor to the invention of some new thing. Only a sincere and well-established love and admiration for the very beautiful traditional music of Ireland has been the incentive to an inquiry into the subject.

I shall select, by way of a text to start with, some words of W. K. Sullivan, who, in his introduction to O'Curry's great work, said of the Irish scales:—"They are manifold and often apparently quite arbitrary, so that the principles upon which they proceed are sometimes incomprehensible to us." That is, "they are many"—"they are often

arbitrary"—"they are sometimes incomprehensible." We must take this as a plea *nolle prosequi*.

Bunting started well, and did invaluable work, probably having been stirred, in the first instance, by reading Walker's glowing pages. But it is to be feared the remark in the preface to "O'Curry" is correct when it is said:—"Walker wrote chiefly from imagination; Bunting from induction: his information being apocryphal and corrupt." That Bunting with all his real and invaluable work upon Irish music had not struck upon the full and true explanation of its scales there are a hundred proofs. He came very near to the light, but his practice was not equal to his theory; or, must we ask, did he, too, like others, sometimes yield to the temptation of flattering the modern ears, instead of keeping his work consistent with the antiquity of his material? Petrie, Dr. Joyce, not to speak of others of less mark, show in their harmonization, similar signs of imperfect method.[1] Even Dr. Parry, in his exhaustive essay upon scales, is shy when he comes to treat of the peculiarities of the Irish scale form.

Looking into the work of such a man as Carl Engel, expecting there, if anywhere, to find firm ground, we meet confusion worse confounded. Indeed his definition of "an Irish scale"—he gives us only one—is the most ridiculous and farthest from the truth of any.

In this connexion, I need not mention Professor Stanford, for his object has been the making of beautiful music, and he has well succeeded. When contriving his accompaniments to the great number of melodies he has edited, he brings the weapons of modern science to his aid, and not troubling too much about antiquarian truth or archaic considerations, his accompaniments are, as he says, "frankly modern." He adopts one of two views, both of which are rational, and have distinguished adherents. His is the artistic method; others find fascination in preserving the truth of the ancient form of a song, and in the archæological side of the study wherein they view the primitive songs as the music of nature not of Art. Such contrasted views it is easy

[1] The noting and the collecting and preserving of melodies is one thing, and much work has been done in this direction by painstaking and enthusiastic collectors; but their harmonization and the fitting to them a suitable accompaniment is quite another matter, and few are the instances where we could say that the result has been other than unfortunate. The work that appears to approach nearest to purity was done by Surenne (1814–1878), in his edition of "Songs of Ireland." The preface to his book, written by Farquharson Graham, is among the most valuable of the literature treating on our subject.

to reconcile by remembering the words of Sir Robert Stewart, that "there is a music of nature and a music of Art; the one as old as the world and as natural as the organs of speech, the other long sought before men found it." Neither of these views can we afford to neglect, but I fear of the two "the music of nature" at present receives by far the smaller share of attention and study, and far less than it deserves.

One is sometimes driven to think that even the true effect of Irish song is forgotten among us. Many who have essayed to imitate the old music for artistic purposes, have done so in a manner as uncertain as if they had set themselves the impossible task of facing both ways. They begin by desiring to appear ancient, but end as thorough moderns! The only sign of their intention remaining is a slight tinge of Irish colour. Besides one often reads such curious theories and such strange opinions. For instance: it has been asserted by a now famous Irish musician that there is a close affinity between Hungarian music and the Irish. I have failed to discover any points of resemblance. It is rather a fashion to class any unaccustomed tonality as Hungarian. Neither in scale nor intervals, in its rhythm, form, harmonies, or habits of sudden and startling modulation, is there any similarity. But, perhaps, some of the highly spiced up-to-date disarrangements of Irish melodies were spoken of. Does not a sentence like the following act as an irritant to set one's teeth on edge, and does it not speak of a complete blank as to scientific knowledge, or any, but the most incomplete, sympathy?—"Though much has been said of the *antiquity* of our music, it is certain that the finest and most popular airs are modern; and, perhaps, we may look no further than the last disgraceful century for the origin of most of the wild and melancholy strains." Who said this? Who think you is responsible for this warped and debased estimate of Irish music? No less a man than Tom Moore. Moore, who, after publishing four books of melodies, said "the work ought to come to an end with the novelty of the early numbers" . . . "lest the poetry should sympathise with the decline of the music." He "feared that his publishers were descending to the gathering of mere seed pearl"; and Moore further accused Bunting, who sincerely endeavoured to preserve what remained of the oldest and most characteristic melodies, of disgracing his pages with too many barbarous rhapsodies. Such airs as did not conform to modern drawing-room requirements, Moore seemed very slow to recog-

nise. He looked upon them as merely "curious," and discouraged his friends from sending him any such. I have quoted his own words. However he may be worthy of worship as a poet—and how much do we owe him?—we may not then look to Moore for "any explanation of the principles upon which the scales proceed."

Moore did a great work for us; he supplied many lovely airs with words fitly wedded and truly poetic; and we must try to agree with Bunting that "the beauty of Mr. Moore's words, in a great degree, atones for the violence done to many of the airs he adopted." To him as a poet, if not as a musician, we owe a large debt of gratitude. In his own proper sphere, Moore's work was most powerful for good; for, to use his own expression, "a pretty air without words resembles one of those half creatures of Plato, which are described as wandering in search of the remainder of themselves through the world." Ireland will honour any of her sons who will worthily continue Moore's work. But this office of National poet seems to have its own serious responsibilities. For, though good poetry, when allied to a fine air, will, together with it, stand the test of time, yet neither good words allied with a bad tune, nor excellent music yoked with inferior verse, will ever be able to make a way into a nation's affections, and earn permanent acceptance. Have we not abundant evidence of the truth of this? Poor verse has choked many a fine air.

But, speaking of the scales, it does not seem very likely, looking around, that we shall find among any of the generally accepted authorities more than half truths, each insufficient in itself to solve the whole mystery of those so-called "arbitrary principles" of scale formation spoken of in our text. Indeed, the whole evidence contributed by the greater part of the writers can only compare to the attempts of a company of savants to describe the nature and form of an unknown animal from their inward consciousness. I may confess to having long felt a strong desire to learn something certain about Irish music. I experienced a feeling of helplessness, and saw little hope of satisfying myself with an explanation of this subject, until by good fortune I chanced to light upon one or two leading principles, which being brought together offered valuable suggestions. Later I was much gratified by reading an able, instructive, but strangely neglected essay by Mr. St. John Lacy. Having applied the system thus formed to the examination of a large number of melodies, I feel hopeful that I have a firm hold of a large part of the truth.

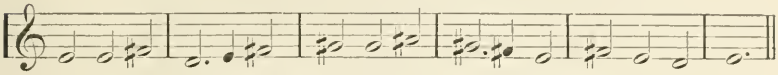
In these matters one should seldom speak as if *ex cathedrâ*. Over confidence is most likely to lead to disaster. My object will be gained if others with fuller information and more leisure will supply that in which my explanation is lacking, and correct me in what I err. All will be very well if what is said or done results in making the music itself in any degree better known, better understood, and still better loved, as it ought to be. This we all trust will be one of the outcomes of our *Feis Ceoil*.

Taking up our text to examine it more closely, we find that its first clause says, that the "Irish scales are manifold." This I would remark cannot be counted as pointing to any distinguishing characteristic of Irish music. For, though the forms employed in modern European science are three only—or at most four—and although, as I presently hope to show, the Irish scales numbered 15, yet this number sinks into insignificance when compared with the 249 distinct scales which Dr. Hatherly describes in his book on Byzantine music. This learned gentleman has just recently been kind enough to send me a print, in which he uses the air "God Save the Queen" to exemplify the use of 24 distinct scale-forms—the most acceptable, we may suppose, in his judgment among 249 Byzantine tonalities.

But a fact of far-reaching and real importance in the history of scale-formation is, that in various divisions of the globe there have existed, nay, do exist, sundry and distinctly different methods of scale-plan. It is hard to decide whether the final causes of these differences lie in the constitutional varieties and racial characteristics, or whether they are a result of climatic influences. Helmholtz is of opinion that the construction of our scales is certainly the work of artistic invention. If this is so, the scale-forms must be subject to the laws of artistic beauty, as yet unwritten. But this we do find, that while the music of one nation suggests a lazy drone, with a smudge of indefinite sounds for its scale, another nation will express in its music a sharp, definite, ringing briskness, and clearly defined sounds, with a tendency to free and extended leaps in its vocal habits. For "racial differences imply different degrees of emotionalism and imaginativeness, and different degrees of the power of self control" (Dr. H. Parry). The range of voice employed by some undeveloped people is confined to two notes or three. Or there are scales of narrow range, but infinitesimal division. Such, for instance, exist among the cannibal islanders. Such scale forms have scarcely reached that precision that marks the scales of

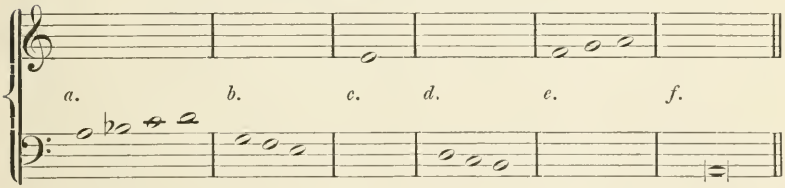
civilization. Then there are those pathetic Oriental scales, frequently moving in augmented intervals; and that curious, and to our feeling, discordant scale of the Siamese, which has no semitones, but all equal tones, throughout its octave.

Fig. I.—God Save the Queen (*in Siamese Scale*).



In some parts of the world, and those not the least important, the scales would seem to have been developed by what is known as the tetrachordal method, which we may take to mean this:—Starting with a narrow range of three or four conjunct notes, this was extended by adding, now one, now another, note, above or below. There would seem to be no doubt that this was the system adopted by the Greeks.

Fig. II.—*Approximate representation of the growth of the Greek Scale (greater system).*



(*a*) The lyre had at first four strings only; (*b*) later three more were added, and an eighth, (*c*) to complete the octave; (*d*) then three others, deeper sounds; (*e*) again three above; (*f*) and finally the lowest of all, to which was given the special name "Proslambanomenos." The evidence goes to prove a system of extension by the addition of adjacent notes.[1] This Greek system, derived in the first instance from Egypt (and so could not have failed to reach the Hebrews), has come down to us, appearing in full freshness in the Gregorian modes, and these have ultimately taken the form of the ordinary European scales.

Now, standing in strong contrast to these Greek scales, there is that which chiefly affects us—a scale-form adopted by a long string of nations, in which certain notes are wanting, and from this circumstance such scales are called "gapped" scales. This fact of gaps in the scale is so distinctly marked that we may safely look upon this habit as pointing out a particular family in the classification of scale-forms. Widespread

[1] See G. A. Macfarren, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

indeed are such gapped scales; something like them has been known in science as of the enharmonic genus. We see them in the music of the Chinese, in Java, in parts of Russia, and in Finland, in Scotland and in Ireland ; and quite recently a most interesting revelation has been made in a journal of American ethnology and archæology, which furnishes evidences of the same principle ruling in the musical system of the Zuñi Indians, inhabiting the very centre of the American continent. The phonograph had been happily used to preserve the musical characteristics of an almost vanishing race.

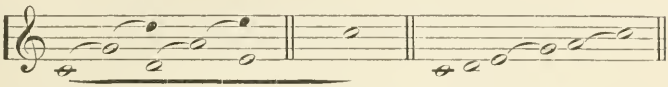
PERIOD I.

We see then that it was in common with many other nations that the Irish started in some remote antiquity with a scale, having five notes only within the octave. And this fact points to an origin quite independent of Greek diatonic influences, and a beginning, or settlement, probably long anterior to the wave that swept over us from the south-east. To make it clear to the understanding we shall not be far wrong in representing these sounds of our old five-note scale as being nearly identical with our notes C, D, E,—G, A,—C.

Dr. Hubert Parry remarks:—"Evidence as well as theory proves almost conclusively that either the interval of the fourth or of the fifth formed the nucleus upon which all scales were based ; and one of the two was probably the interval which primitive savages endeavoured to hit in their first attempts at music." In this he is in accordance with Mr. Herbert Spencer, "who shows how music is directly derived from the natural variation of inflection in the speaking voice under various states of feeling." In these words, Mr. Statham epitomises Mr. Spencer's theory, while only in part agreeing with it. But so far we may suppose that these limited vocal cries or cadences formed the first small material out of which music grew, and were suggested by the more or less energetic character of the people. The low tone and the high tone of the voice would become points well recognised and determined, and between these limits, high and low, the voice would curvet about, at first indefinitely ; but when sounds had become fixed by the invention of some musical tone-defining instrument, the pitch was no longer an uncertain thing. For then, instead of the haphazard slide of the speaking voice, and the still untutored efforts of the singer, there were, to some extent, clearly defined steps of artistically selected musical

intervals. On some such principle of vocal cadence having a fixed interval, we should not find it very difficult to imagine how a scale could be felt out; starting at C, and making an addition of fifths above this note, we get these results—

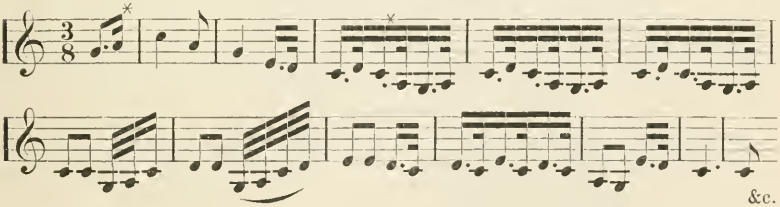
Fig. III. OR



which it will be distinctly seen are the notes forming what is described above as the most ancient form of the Scotch and Irish scale.

Here, then, we will suppose ourselves firmly established in the use of the primitive scale, the existence of which is scarcely open to doubt; though, as to the process of its growth, there may be various opinions. These, at least, are the sounds that are used in the composition of all the most ancient melodies, Scotch and Irish alike. And if they are met with in the melodies of tradition, we may confidently accept them; for, where no sort of notation was in existence that could fix the sounds, and the science of music was as yet non-existent, scales may only be learned from the melodies themselves, traditionally transmitted. Bunting clearly observed the incompleted form of the scale used in the most ancient tunes; also the peculiar tonality of others; but he attributes the effects to quite other causes than the right ones; and various writers on this subject, as I have already shown, speak part of the truth and give examples of scales, and propound theories concerning them, which account for a few only among the larger number of varieties. I shall now refer to the melody figured IV. This figure gives a phrase from a melody in the First Mode.

Fig. IV.—Joyce's Tune. *Bunting's* 1796 *vol.*

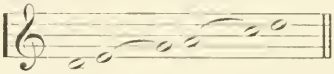


&c.

The actual pitch, from want of information, we cannot exactly define. It matters little, however, what was the pitch; probably it was variable at will; but for our present convenience we will suppose the lowest sound to be represented by our note C. The form of the scale

is the vital point. It will be seen that the notes F and B, or the fourth and seventh of the scale are absent. It should then be noted that C in these tunes is regarded as the tonic, the final, or concluding note, to which all other notes seem to turn as their home or resting-place.

Fig. V.—Mode II.



Here we must pause for a moment to notice an important trait in the Irish musical system. It took its rise, it would seem, from a *mixing* of methods. It is a resultant of distinct and perhaps opposing influences which came together at the meeting and cohesion of races. Upon the original design of the gapped scale we have now to graft a method common in Greek and south Europe practice. In the melodies just now cited, C was the final; but if, instead of accepting C as the final, we give to D, or E, or G, or A, the position of final, we shall at once feel that in each case the expression, the meaning, and the whole tonality appear to change. It was in this way that the Greeks themselves treated their series of scale-sounds, thus obtaining what was called the several modes.

In mediæval times, this treatment of the scales gave what are known as the Gregorian or Church modes. But we must note one vastly important difference between the oldest Irish scales and the Greek diatonic system, namely, that whereas these Greek modes lay in an unbroken and continuous string of sounds, from octave to octave, each mode containing five tones and two semitones, the Irish scale in its first and earliest form never forgets that its 4th and 7th sounds are absent, indeed are non-existent. We notice with interest how the notes of the tunes made of five sounds jump over these gaps, and are arranged with evident knowledge of their position. There is no sign that these leaps occurred in like manner at any other parts of the scale. In fact there would appear to have been a necessity for the player to skip these particular notes, seeing that they had no place on the instrument; as yet the scale development had not grown sufficiently to include them. It is probable that of airs most ancient, written in this method, some are wholly lost (they have floated away into forgetfulness); while others remain to us, but in a form more or less modernized and disguised, whether by unconscious change or deliberate tinkering we need not stop to inquire. Many

tunes, on the other hand, may be referable to a date somewhat recent, but still bearing the signs of the ancient form, character, and practices, having been constructed by musicians to whom the ancient and traditional principles were well known.

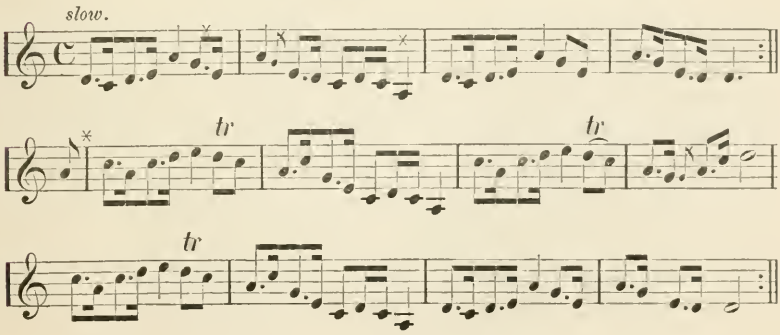
If we are engaged in the critical examination of a melody, the accented points and marked peculiarities, the presence or absence of certain scale sounds, the notes holding first rank in the melody, i.e. the outline plan and the vital frame are the points which should have our chief attention; mere accidental embellishments, notes of passing, and flowery additions, will have scarcely any weight in deciding upon the age or the original form of the melody. For very often, such are mere excrescences, and have been added unconsciously, or in wayward caprice, by the more recent performers. The steps and the process whereby the more ancient characteristics have been made to bend to modern practices can often be distinctly traced by comparing several versions of the same air collected in various parts of the country.

It will be obvious that the sounds forming our earliest gapped scale, treated on the Greek-like principle I have mentioned, are capable of five various and distinctly different arrangements, each arrangement being commonly called a *mode*. In each and all of these modes we have airs, though, as I assume, their nature has seldom been rightly apprehended.

For example, Mr. Sullivan, as shown in my text, assumed the scales were (and have generally been supposed to be) arbitrary and incomprehensible. I trust I may show that they are not so.

It is now my duty to give other airs in scales belonging also to the first period, in each of the modes. The scale marked V. and air, "Tiernna

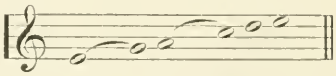
Fig. Vᵃ.—Tiernna Mayo. *From a very old print.*



Mayo" (from a very old print) marked figure V *a*. are in the second mode ranging from D to D, but with neither F nor B. A different version, called "Lord Mayo," is printed in Holden's collection of Irish airs, and in Joyce, 1888. Bunting, in 1809, has another version under the same name, but so little like it that it is difficult to recognize it as the same. There is yet another version, under the title "Tiagharna Mhaigheeo," No. 15, Walker's Bards. This again differs greatly from the other versions. Yet, strange to say, all these versions of the air remain perfectly true to the contents of the ancient scale. That is, the primal scale being gapped—starting from C and omitting F and B—the second mode of the scale (in which this tune is written), having D for the final, will be found also wanting the notes F and B, so that we have now the scale of D, but without either the 3rd or the 6th degrees. Of course such omissions must, and do produce a very marked and characteristic effect.

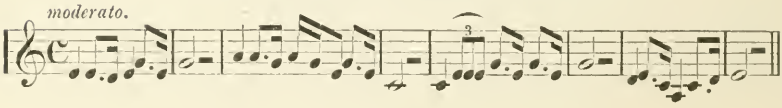
Now, having explained the nature of the modes, we may hope that the system will be readily understood. The third mode of this period stands thus: —

Fig. VI.—Mode III.



The next example I give is taken from Crotch's specimens, No. 47.

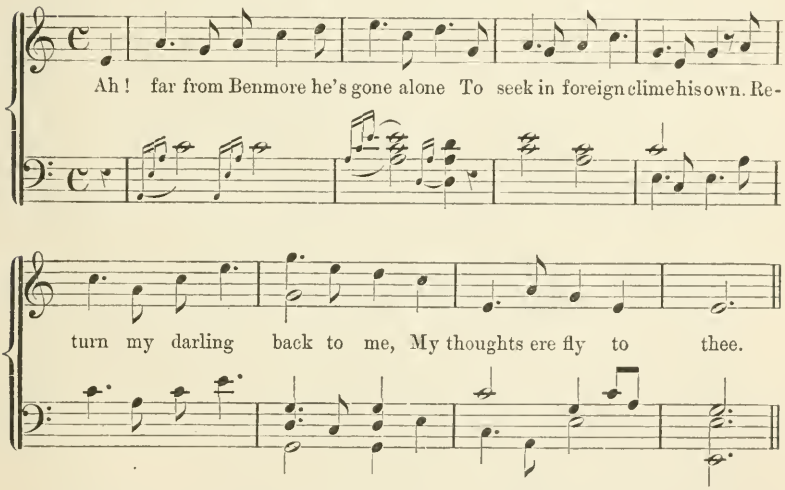
Fig. VI[a].—The Battle of Argan Mor.



It is there described as very ancient, and most probably it is so; but, as given in Crotch, its meaning and form are wholly disguised. Transposing it a 4th up, he forces it to conform to the harmonies of F major, though its final is E. If satisfactory harmony for a melody cannot readily be found, we should let it go unharmonized; for does not its tonality plainly show that it was written in an age when harmony could be dispensed with, and that it came into being before the modern harmonic system was known—known at least to the singer of the song? This air is much older than the modern

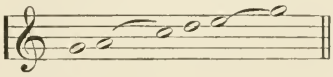
system of harmony, and should not be forced into wearing a harmonic garment of so modern a fashion as that provided by Dr. Crotch. As O'Curry points out—"Multivocal music had not reached Ireland at the time when such an air may be supposed to have had its birth." It seems, then, an artistic violence and an anachronism to present it as given by Dr. Crotch. Let it be sung with passionate fervour, without accompaniment, or at most with a drone bass, or in unison with an occasional chord of the harp, and the meaning will be at once sufficiently clear. I give another specimen in this mode, carrying words—

Fig. VI^{b}.—Ah! Far from Benmore. J. C. C.



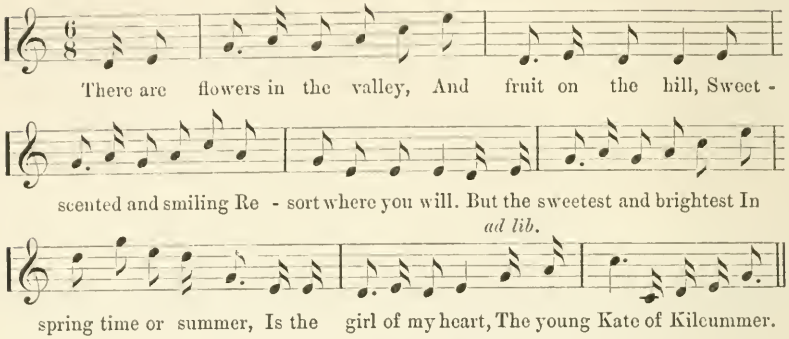
Of mode No. IV., starting on G, I have no good authentic example at hand. Comparatively rare as the melodies are belonging to the modes of the first period, there is not one of the scales, as we shall see presently, more likely to become drawn to modern methods than this 4th mode; and it is quite probable that many airs originally sung in this mode and belonging to this period, have changed their form with the fashion of the day, and are now living disguised through affiliation with more recent methods. This is the form of the scale :—

Fig. VII.—Mode IV.



I have an air made in this mode, showing the general effect of its music :—

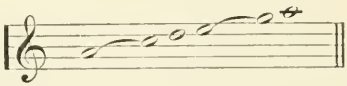
Fig. VII[a].—Kate of Kilcummer (*accompaniments omitted*). J. C. C.



(*See "Popular Songs of Ireland," Croker, for the verse.*)

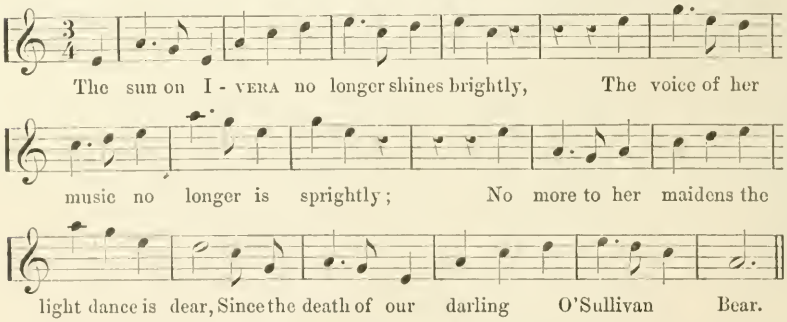
The fifth and last mode of this first period has A for the final, and the scale is wanting in the 2nd and 6th.

Fig. VIII.—Mode V.



A fairly good example of this mode is a tune appearing under the title of "A Bunch of Green Rushes." But to show the pathos that this mode is capable of, I will add also another example that may serve as a proof of the theory here displayed.

Fig. VIII[a].—Dirge of O'Sullivan Bear (*accompaniment omitted*). J.C.C.



The three foregoing examples have been dropped in, not merely because the supply of airs suitable to illustrate some of these modes of

the first period is now undoubtedly scanty, but rather to suggest that, with the clue in his hand, no writer need shrink from employing these or any other of the ancient modes, if the plan and colour of his work call for it. The method of their use should be accurate and scientific, and their adoption as an artistic means admits of no uncertainty of effect. Nor need he fear that their use must result in his slipping into some vague smudge of supposed Irish tonalities. Further, it should be seen, and the knowledge should have a salutary effect, that any addition or alteration, by way of spicy chromatic effects, added in vain caprice or ignorance by would-be arrangers, lies open for detection under the eye of the public. Wonderful things in the nature of sugary hotchpotch have been put together in the name of "Irish music"!

I may call attention to the simple way the examples are presented to you, namely, without transposition—a plan which makes a comparison one with another quite easy. It is to the unfortunate and confusing, but perhaps necessary, habit of transposing these old melodies into any or every key convenience suggested, that we must attribute that obscuring cloud which seems to have been too thick for the vision of many of the latter-day "arrangers." It speaks volumes for the truth and accuracy of the melodic records made by Bunting, Petrie, Dr. Joyce, and others; and it is a comforting and very reassuring fact that, in spite of misunderstandings manifold as to harmonic fitness, the airs, caught up from singers having the true traditions, have been by them, carefully noted and faithfully preserved almost true to scale and without a sign of faltering. The same may be said of some of those most interesting examples, evidently obtained at first hand, furnished in the pages of the "Citizen" and some other treasuries of ancient song. It is, too, an argument of the greatest weight in favour of the theory here explained, that, when melodies are even now obtained from sources removed from the contamination of the vulgarising music hall, and from fashion and modern influences, they do seem to be formed quite accurately upon one or another of these modes, and that, let it be remembered, after so long use among the untutored peasantry.

But, when in their notation the airs are tricked out with all sorts of conventional ornaments, and when they have become transposed, there have been introduced elements leading to quite hopeless confusion. We find Petrie, for instance, presenting airs in what O'Curry calls a "fabulous" key: F minor, four flats (or even B flat minor, five flats).

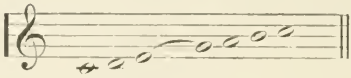
It is not, then, with much surprise that we find him joining with this needless deformity—and it is nothing short of a deformity viewing his work from the historical standpoint—the guilt of grossly contorted out-of-the-key harmonies.

I fear we must agree that the aphorism of Sir Gavan Duffy holds good in the case of Irish music: "What a man does not understand he does not possess." Many people look into these old songs with a dull vision and imperfect understanding. They may be, and often are possessed by a quite certain feeling that they are dealing with something uncommonly beautiful. Yet the particular and vital characteristics are not within their ken.

PERIOD II.

I ask you to call to mind that our most ancient pentatonic scale was obtained by the addition of 5th to 5th (see fig. III.), the last note mentioned being E. In advancing to what we may look upon as the second period, another 5th must be added above the note E of the first period scale. This is B, and it provides us with a sound forming the 7th degree or leading note, which we find adds immeasurably to the effect and capability of the scale; there is a new vent for feeling supplied by the happy singer who felt his way along the hidden chain of harmony. To some, at first sight, a note more or less may appear of no great importance, but in reality this added note opens up new and very remarkable possibilities; in fact, it makes a great change as well as a large addition to the range of expression, and in a very marked degree adds to the harmonic resources. Our prime scale of this second period stands thus:—

Fig. IX.—Mode I.



There is still a gap between E and G.

All the airs I have cited for you, and all that I have yet to give, have been harmonized with strict truth to their scale; for example, so far we have not been able to admit either the fourth or seventh into our scale; so those degrees have also been rigorously excluded from the

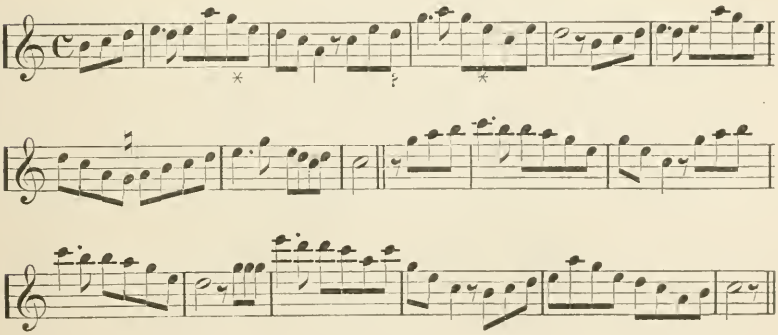
harmony, and so far these notes have not been heard either in melody or harmony. By this abstention from modern effects I hope we have been able to draw nearer to the ancient traditions.

Now, having to deal with music of the second period, we shall be permitted to use B♮, which will make the harmonizing a much easier task. Various airs could be produced written in this form, and in its first mode ranging from C to C. I might have selected as an example the well-known air "Grammachree Molly," played by Fannin, a harper, at the remarkable meeting in Belfast, in 1792, when there were gathered all the best harpers then living. That meeting was the initial cause of Bunting's three large and most important collections. This air was taken from Bunting's book, and treated by Moore as "The harp that once thro' Tara's halls." It is quite evidently written in this first mode of the second period, except in the sixth line at the words "so glory's thrill is o'er." Here, attention being called to the fact, and comparing the rest of the tune, one feels quite sure that, in the use of a single fourth of the scale, though only as a slight passing note, the air has received a touch from a modern hand. It was not Moore's, for the air so stood before Moore's words were so happily married to it. With a scarcely noticeable change it may be restored to the purity of its scale.

Another beautiful specimen in this mode is the air treated by Moore, "As a beam on the face of the waters may glow."

Another is "Jimmy, my thousand Treasures" (see Joyce, "Irish Music"). But I should like to play an air which is very beautiful. It appears in Petrie as "A Londonderry Air." It is harmonized true to its scale in *Feis Ceoil* Collection.

Fig. IX[a].—A Londonderry Air. *Petrie* (p. 57).



Just in the same way that we went through the different modes of the first period we can go through the modes of this scale with its added B ♮.

When treating of the second period, of course we find ready to our hand melodies far more numerous than when we were considering the first period forms, and many of these are even now well known. Nearly all the examples collected in "Walker's Bards" should be classed as belonging to the second period in its various modes.

You shall now hear characteristic phrases from songs in each mode. The second mode ranging from D to D has no third, and so the note F is never sounded throughout the melody, nor should I admit it to the harmony if such were added.

Fig. X.—Mode II.

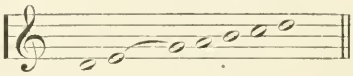
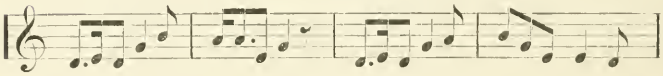


Fig. Xa.—*From Crotch's Specimens, No.* 65.

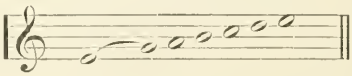


&c.

In the third mode E to E a gap occurs between E and G.

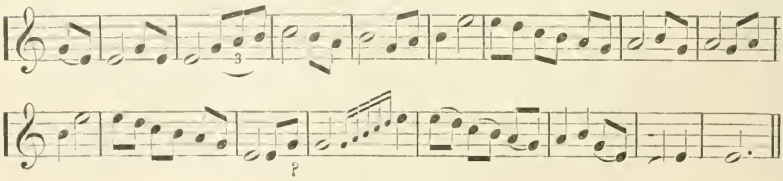
Examples of this mode are: "The Willow-tree"; "The hour I prove false" (Petrie, p. 181); and perhaps best of all, a fine jig called "The Kissing Match," of Munster origin, printed in *Feis Ceoil* Collection.

Fig. XI.—Mode III.



The example following is from Walker (No. 11):

Fig. XIa.—Speic Gailleanach. *Walker, No.* 11.



In the fourth mode there is no scarcity of examples. For instance, there are several in "Walker's Bards." Of these I shall play one, numbered 7.

Fig. XII.—Mode IV.

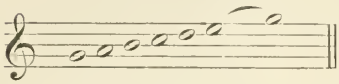
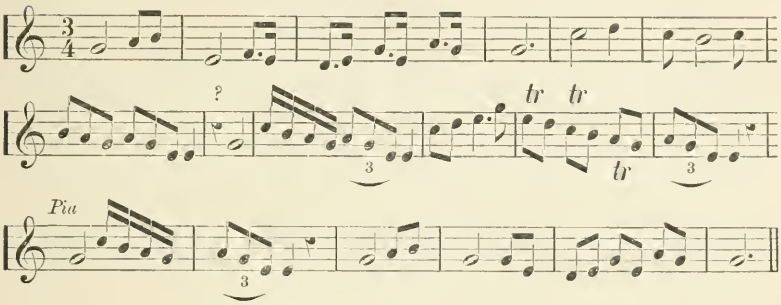
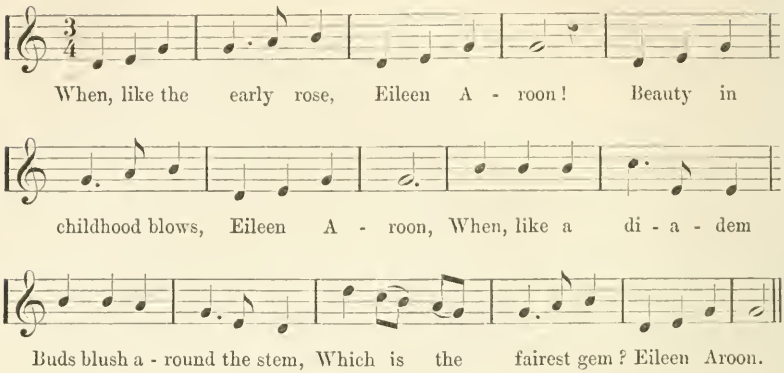


Fig. XII[a].—D'eala Mairi lioma. *Walker, No.* 7.



Let me mention also "The Meeting of the Waters," and two airs in "Petrie," pp. 70, 71. In connexion with this mode, I should like to show you a version of "Eileen Aroon," which has come into my hands from a southern district, and which will be interesting. You will remember, in its Scotch form, it is known as "Robin Adair," and there have been lively discussions in this, as in many another case, about the ownership, and which country has the better right to the tune. Now this Munster copy stands here in a most interesting relationship. For it appears to be much older than any other version; indeed, it is true throughout to this ancient gapped scale of the second period. We are now considering our fourth mode. It is so plain to be seen how the modern tonality influenced the ears of the singers, and caused the introduction of a modern scale note, as we find it in the version as usually received. As for the Scotch form, while having all the modern tokens, there are added besides the peculiarities of the Scottish snap rhythm. We may then consider that the evidence is greatly in favour of claiming for this simple, but beautiful, air an Irish origin. Bunting's version, adopted by Professor Stanford, is (unlike Moore's) almost true to the old scale, but its simple beauty is so overlaid with excrescences that the air is scarcely to be recognized.

Fig. XII[b].—Eileen Aroon. *Munster traditional.*



Other Examples are:—"Old Head of Denis"; "The Meeting of the Waters"; "Wild Irish Boy"; "The Foresters' Song" (Graves, "Irish Song Book"); "Lamentation of Deirdre."

The fifth mode, ranging from A to A, with a gap at F, is exemplified in the well-known air in Bunting, "The Pretty Girl milking the Cows," or, in Moore's version, "The Valley lay smiling before me"; but as usually sung, there is a single changed note in the second part, which, if admitted as correct, would throw this song forward into a much later time. As a fine and not well-known example of this mode I should like to play for you "Slieve Gallen," from Bunting's third volume, where, however, he makes havoc of the tonalities, using quite impossible notes both in melody and harmony. See *Feis Ceoil* Collection, where this air is harmonized true to its scale. See also "John O'Dwyer of the Glen" (Joyce, 1888); and "The hour I prove false" (Petrie, p. 181).

Fig. XIII.—Mode V.

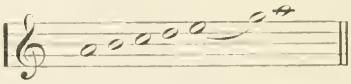
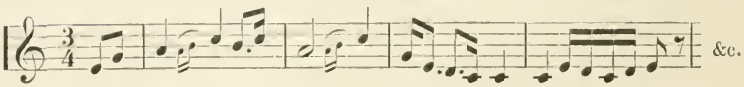


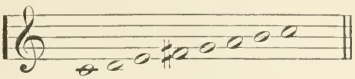
Fig. XIII[a]—Fragment of Slieve Gallen.



PERIOD III.

So far the second period with its six-note scale. We now move forward towards the time when, searching for novelty, musicians marked the coming of the third period by the addition of still another fifth. This will give us, what at first sight seems an unexpected note, F sharp, and the scale will now stand:—

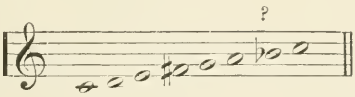
Fig. XIV.—Mode I.



As may be supposed, this new note will again produce very remarkable changes. This, the fully formed Irish scale, is in the present form identical with the Greek scale, more commonly called the "Lydian."

Carl Engel adopts something like this as "the Irish scale," but he drops into it an unexplained, and certainly unauthorized B flat. His

Fig. XIV[a].



construction of the Irish scale must have been evolved from his inward consciousness, for no such scale was ever known in practice. He had no doubt arrived at the conviction that the Irish scale contained F sharp. But he, like ourselves, had probably also heard much of the parrot-like talk to be frequently found conveyed to the pages of small magazine articles about the flattened Irish seventh: so he rashly added a flat to the B out of respect to this prejudice. So dangerous are half-truths![1]

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[1] Engel (1866) may have founded his extraordinary statement upon "La Musique mise à la portée de tout le Monde" (1839), Fétis, a book at one time highly thought of. It was translated for the Boston Academy of Music in 1842. The following extraordinary sentences are worth quoting. Perhaps they may help to explain many things that have seemed inexplicable:—

"Les Ecossais et les Irlandais ont une gamme majeure assez semblable à la gamme des Chinois, mais plus singulière encore que celle-ci. . . . Les défauts de cette gamme sont encore plus choquants pour une oreille de musicien que celle des Chinois. . . . De là vient que tous les airs écossais ou irlandais composés d'après cette gamme ont dû être arrangés et dénaturés pour être publiés. Les Irlandais ont aussi une gamme mineure qui est fort singulière; elle n'a que six notes, et sa disposition est faite comme on le voit ici":—

A, B, C, D, E, F♯.

Is there to be found a clearer case of a teacher needing instruction? The muddle is complete. See our Fig. XVIII.

Sir Robert Stewart, in Grove's Dictionary, gives a very clear view of four of the modes belonging to the third period, with examples of their use. It is of the developed state and form of Irish music in its third period that Michael Conran elaborately treated. He failed, however, to give any satisfactory account of what came earlier. He appears to assume that all Irish melodies are founded on the Greek modes. I hope I have proved that this is a fallacy. Irish music and its principles were established long before the time when, through a logical development, its scales merged into and became identical with the Greek modes. This fact marked the third and latest period of development.

I would further ask you to consider with me one or two facts of ancient practice which should make us better able to understand the conditions under which the old musicians worked, and put into our hand a helpful test by which we may detect the impurities and frauds, excrescences, and the added vanities of the singer, or of the disarranger, which, little by little, have overgrown, encrusted, and in some cases almost hidden the true form of the original simple and beautiful melody. We will now say nothing of rhythmic changes, additions of dots to the notes, flourishes, "graces," and local peculiarities, such as the Scotch "snap." These are sufficiently disfiguring, and through their means much change has been wrought. Take one simple but crucial test, the efficacy of which, and its undoubted historic authority, should make it very helpful in the hands of those who would test the truth, form, and age of a melody. Let us but remember that the harp, until the early years of this present century, wire-strung and simple in form, had a fixed scale, and was wholly incapable of modulation in our present meaning of that word. It could be tuned to any scale, but once tuned its scale was fixed. No further argument can then be needed to show that if any air under examination depends for its effect upon modulation, changing tonality, or semitone effects, it must either have been tampered with, or it is of a nature that forbids our classing it among ancient melodies. Even if it contain any single note changed by accidentals or in any degree chromatic, such alterations must either be marks of impurities or be regarded as proof that it has been tricked out by would-be improvers. Bunting was in some instances specially guilty of these imprudent alterations, and in a few cases, out of many, he acknowledges his iniquity in a foot-note. Having made some outrageous changes of this sort, in deference to modern feeling of tonality, he marks them "by licence." By licence indeed! I think such

changes would have been most blamable if they had not been done in total ignorance of the required scale-forms and true spirit of the air. There is a myth that harpers sometimes altered the pitch of a string by pressing the brim of a hat against it; such a nonsenical plea is surely unworthy of attention. Besides, modulation in music is quite a modern science. We are dealing with antiquity. The bulk of these beautiful airs sprang into being most probably before modulation had been thought of, and before the tricks of science and the new powers of modern harmony had germinated.

History shows that the true Irish system, after languishing for a long period, finally gave up the ghost at the end of the last century. It was during the process of disintegration that brought what remained of Irish music into line with modern fashions (when the antique was unpopular)—it was in this period of decadence that modulation made inroads, and began to be looked upon as an essential. I am in no way discounting the vital importance and the positive beauty of modulation in modern music, but its admission is completely against the spirit of ancient Irish practice.

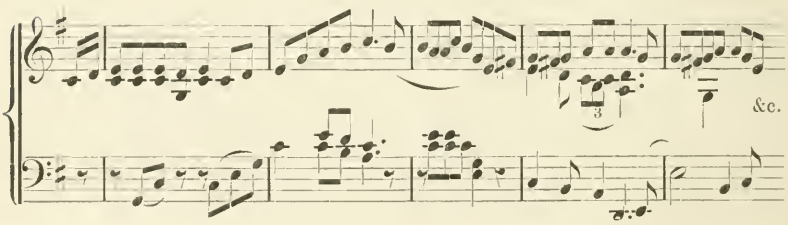
Perhaps the best evidence of the final and complete surrender of Irish music to the encroachments of modern methods is the harp made by John Egan, of Dawson-street, early in this century. This had a full set of modulating keys working a set of cranks to all intents and purposes exactly like the early pedal harps. Until the invention of these keys, the Irish harp was incapable of modulation from key to key; and my argument is that, in old Irish music intended to be sung with harp accompaniment, no harmony or melody note should occur which implies modulation or chromatic effects, and that any such must be spurious and untrue to the original intention and spirit of the music. The invention of these transposing keys is a sure sign that the older tonalities were becoming neglected and modern fashions prevailing.

The strongest temptation which besets modern arrangers and editors is that of making for these simple old melodies a wonderful coat of modern-sounding harmonies, florid and ornate as any that Haydn ever wrote, and coloured after the vivid style of Richard Wagner or Brahms. And this practice is defended as being in accordance with the spirit of the age—our age—and as giving the melody a better chance of touching the emotions of the listeners. This argument some of us find it difficult to admit; for, in the first instance, such changes wholly misrepresent the expression and intention of the original—a new thing is

substituted. In national song, of the purest forms, melody alone should reign. Schumann may speak of Melody as Queen; Harmony as King; but in folk-song harmonic accompaniment does not know its place if it attempt to raise itself above the rank and dignity of a devoted attendant. Would you heavily spice the delicate wines of rare vintages? Then, why should such mellowed music as these well-seasoned songs be rendered sharp, tart, and pert, and disguised out of all recognition, to make them acceptable to overstrained palates?

After this necessary interlude, we will return to conclude our examination of the historical development of the scale. We have already seen that our perfected scale of the third period in its primary form was C D E F♯ G A B C. In this its first mode we shall find not many illustrative examples. One, perhaps, of this nature is to be met in Crosby's "Irish Musical Repository" called "Dennis Delany." An interesting example is "A Lamentation Air" in Dr. Joyce's collection, which I have reharmonized so as to avoid false modulation.

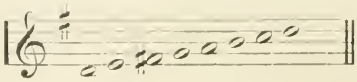
Fig. XIV^{b}.—A Lamentation Air. *Joyce* (p. 30).



This air seems at first sight to imply a modulation quite of the modern sort, and probably such an example would tend to lead the ear to understand the process of modulation. But none the less the tune may be regarded as true to the first mode of the third period, and, I must repeat, the modern science of modulation was not yet understood. You will remark that it has F♯, a note now necessary to the scale, but no F♮ occurs. That would be an impossible note. The harp could not have F♯ and F♮ at the same time.

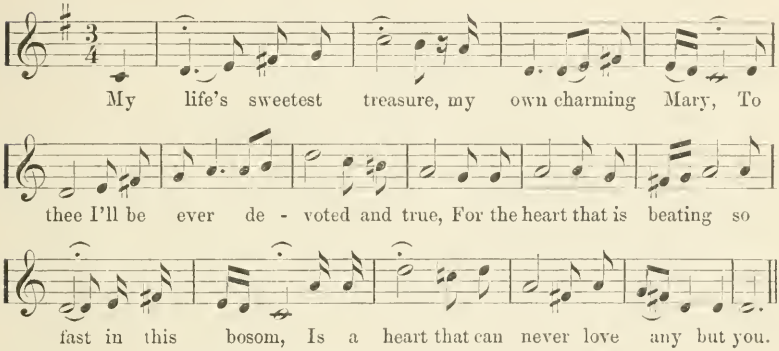
In the second mode running from D to D with F♯ and C♮,

Fig. XV.—Mode II.



there is the well-known air to Moore's words, "Lesbia hath a beaming eye." Another is "The Song of Sorrow" in Bunting's second volume. Another is called "A Wife of my own." Also we have "The Advice" in Petrie, and "The Yellow Bittern" in Bunting's third volume (see *Feis Ceoil* collection). This I should like to play for you, reharmonized, to clear away the so-called "licences" and spurious modulations. And you will forgive my adding another example—a remarkable one—which I noted in county Antrim.

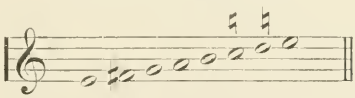
Fig. XV[a].—Antrim Air.



N.B.—The Time is quite *Ad libitum*.

In the third mode, starting on E,

Fig. XVI.—Mode III.

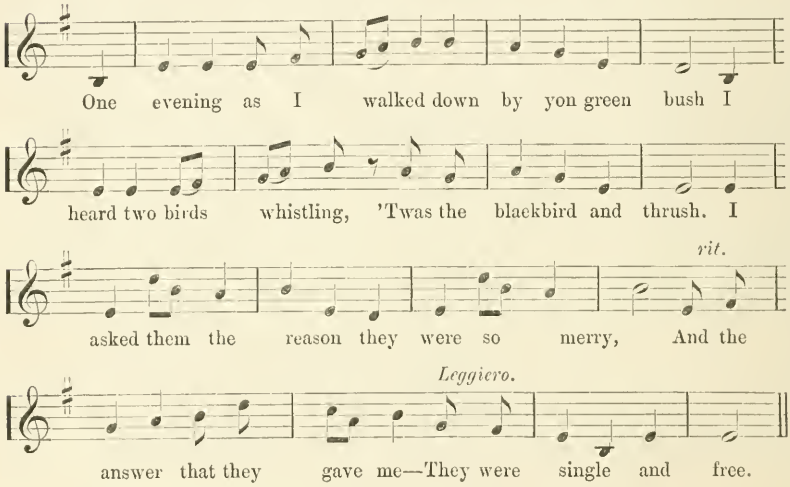


we may mention as an example the well-known air, "Avenging and Bright." A fine air, but spoiled by foreign notes, is known as "Scorching is this love," in Petrie. He also has another, a beautiful air, "I'll make my Love a Breast of Glass" (Petrie, p. 68). If our favourite air, "Silent, O Moyle," is not in this mode, it cannot be classed under the category of ancient melodies; its form, as generally received—and very beautiful it is, notwithstanding—does not fit with any of the ancient Irish scales. There is no doubt that it has been, either deliberately or unconsciously, changed by the addition of accidentals from this third mode Irish scale of the third period into a

melody conformable to the ordinary modern arbitrary minor scale. We are indebted to Dr. Stanford for restoring this air, and many others of the Moore Collection, to their true tonality and form, at least as far as the voice part is concerned. This is a point gained; and, if his method is not consistent throughout in his treatment of all the airs, his authority will weigh heavily in favour of a reconsideration of the whole question.

I have in this mode a most attractive air from Donegal, which is, as I think, comparatively unknown.

Fig. XVI[a].—One Evening as I Walked. *Donegal Air.*



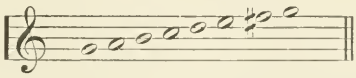
The very simple and beautiful air, "I once loved a Boy," given by Petrie, is also in this mode.

The fourth mode of this period—that is, the scale running from G to G, with an F♯—is, perhaps, of all others the most interesting, as being simply and purely our own present major diatonic scale, pitched on G as a key-note; and I would here also again call attention to the identity of the Irish scale of the third period, completely developed, with the Greek modes. So long as the gapped scale existed, the differences were wide enough. This scale on G, mode iv., we must look upon as the link which connects us and our present practice with the past. That it lends itself more readily than any other to harmonization is a sufficient reason for its great popularity, and almost exclusive use when harmony had once become a necessity. And there is, perhaps, besides,

some unexplained fitness inherent to it and its expression which aids in conveying the spirit and feeling of our own time. However this may be, the scale is the prime favourite; and the tendency of editors and arrangers has been—and this is the head and front of their offending—to make the ancient melodies forget all about their parentage, and (by a change here and a touch there, and an entirely new harmonic dress) all the 15 scales have been made to serve as dependents of this all-absorbing dominating major diatonic mode—thus most seriously narrowing the range and expressiveness of ideas and feeling in Irish music.

To give an example of this 4th mode—

Fig. XVII.—Mode IV.

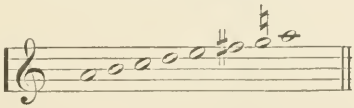


we have but to draw upon a mass of familiar material. We should, however, have to look far to find an air finer than "The Coulin," though the second part of this air (as commonly sung) shows an unmistakable modulation of the modern sort into a related key, which, I think, proves that it has not escaped the effect of modern treatment, and we see the result of changes made to flatter modern ears. Dr. Stanford's edition, following Bunting's, is very different to Moore's, and the air is true to scale.

In this mode we may also take for examples, "St. Patrick's Day" and "Planxty Kelly." The air, "Oh, doubt me not," is true to this scale as given by Moore. Dr. Stanford, in this instance, is curiously inconsistent. Two beautiful airs, not well known, are in *Feis Ceoil* Collection. "Love in Secret," "Love's a tormenting pain (Connallon, 1670), (see *Feis Ceoil* Collection).

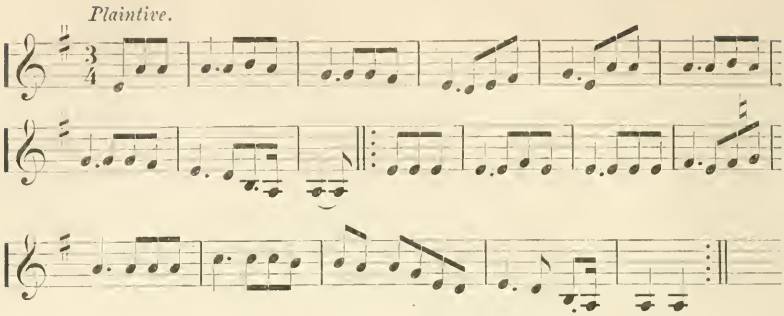
The fifth mode—the last we have to consider—having A as the final,

Fig. XVIII.—Mode V.



may be illustrated by an Achil air taken from Bunting (1845, p. 106), which I make bold to assert he has, in his harmonization, dragged violently from its proper tonality.

Fig. XVIIIa.



The air is evidently of a minor nature; in fact, a scale of A minor with an F♯ but a G♮; yet Bunting has contorted it and dressed it up in major-key harmonies. One note in order to fit his plan of harmonization has been changed by an unwarranted accidental. I am sorry to say I could point to a number of similar cases, even in modern arrangements where the air has been most cruelly forced into a scale unknown to it; often alterations are made, too, in the shape of the melody, either by additions, clippings, mistaken tonalities, or even by transferring a portion of the air to the arranger's new "accompaniment," so as to make it conform to the ways of the newly imposed key.

The last example that I shall have to ask you to listen to is an air of remarkable character in this fifth mode, called "Drimmin Dhu Deelish." Bunting has an air of the same name, but differing greatly from it. This version was taken down from the singing of the Rev. Canon Carmichael, who learned it, when a child, from his nurse. It is perfectly true to this scale—the fifth mode of the third period.

After these explanations, and so many convincing examples of the strict order and no less logical development of the ancient Irish musical practice, I trust you will agree with me in opposing to the words of my text a direct negative; and say with me that the Irish scales are not vaguely numerous; that they never were arbitrary; and that they are not incomprehensible.

In citing examples I have not always used the most commonly known airs, for there are so very many in the greater number of our fifteen scales, expressive and beautiful, which lie in clusters to our

hand to be drawn upon. I would that more of these could be heard, and made to speak to the hearts of our people.

But for the rest—and I would appeal chiefly to musicians, and to those musical amateurs who can see the truth—let there be no further tampering with the true traditions; let us not wantonly "improve" these sacred relics of antiquity until they become non-existent. Should we not revere the men of former days who sang with hearts so full, and voices so sweet? Then let us light again the low burning "lamp of memory" in their honour. Mr. W. K. Sullivan, in his introduction, gives us a warning, and prophecies that the disappearance of Irish music before harmonic music "is as inevitable as the disappearance of the red man before the encroaching white." We hope this may be no more true than his dictum in our text. At any rate, let us raise our voices, and use our influence towards the restoration and purification of ancient melodies from the strangely distorted and cankering effects wrought by modern tampering. Surely there is something of sacrilege when ruthless hands pull them thread by thread to tatters. Such irreverent treatment let us not countenance. Are not these songs the voices of your dead forefathers? Let us cherish and protect them.

THE END.

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